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ABSTRACT

The study reported in this paper was conducted to determine the need for "see" references for authors' names in library catalogs. Nine-item patron questionnaires were placed in the University of Rhode Island's main library. Over the course of six years, 160 questionnaires were completed, 47 by undergraduate students, 76 by graduate students, 17 by faculty, and 20 by other patrons. Only two of the 160 patrons encountered a "see" reference while using the library's card catalog. The surnames patrons used to search the catalog were correct 94% of the time. Forenames were correct 88% of the time. Patrons failed to locate items held by the library 23% of the time. Reasons for failure were: (1) filing rules or cataloging information displayed were misunderstood; (2) information about the holding library was not understood; and (3) the call number of the desired item was incorrectly transcribed. These results suggest that time spent on providing "see" references would be more productively spent in patron instruction. (Contains 11 references.) (KRN)

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ED 364 249

"See" REFERENCES FOR AUTHORS' NAMES REVISITED

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WHO NEEDS "See" REFERENCES FOR AUTHORS' NAMES?

ABSTRACT

A study to determine the need for "See" references for authors' names in library catalogs was conducted at the University of Rhode Island main library. A total of 160 searches by patrons revealed minimal involvement with "See" references thereby questioning a long established library practice. However, the study did identify a number of search failures which suggest that more attention should be paid to teaching patrons better searching techniques.

INTRODUCTION

The need for "See" references from variant forms of a name to the established form of a name used in library author catalogs has never been seriously questioned except for two 1984 studies by Taylor[1] and Thomas[2] and one 1987 study by Watson and Taylor[3] all related to the use of online catalogs. In an attempt to determine the actual need for "See" references in library author catalogs, the authors tried to measure the needs of patrons using the author/title card catalog at the University of Rhode Island main library in Kingston. The study was conducted in two stages; the results of a preliminary study involving 95 searches was published in 1991[4] with the final results becoming available with the freezing of the card catalog in March of 1993 when an on-line catalog took its place.

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

The main library at the University of Rhode Island serves approximately 9,000 undergraduate students, 3,000 graduate students, and 750 faculty. The University grants degrees ranging from the Associate to the Ph.D. Colleges include Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Continuing Education, Engineering, Human Science and Services, Nursing, Pharmacy, and Resource Development.

There are more than sixty areas of study leading to the master's degree, including Library and Information Science, and more than thirty areas of study leading to the doctoral degree.

The catalog at the University of Rhode Island was divided during the mid-1970's into separate author/title and subject catalogs. Between the mid-1970's and 1987, "See" references for personal and corporate names were made on a highly selective and occasionally haphazard basis. Since 1987, the making of "See" references for personal and corporate names has been greatly increased but still on a somewhat selective and haphazard basis (e.g., many foreign language "See" references are not made). "See" references have long been made for all compound names.

METHODOLOGY

A conscious effort was made to avoid at least some of the methodological pitfalls described by Hafter[5] in her 1979 article on catalog use studies. In order to preclude the possibility of an interviewer influencing the patron's response, a short nine item questionnaire (See Table 1), to be completed at the discretion of the patron, was made available at the author/title catalog during a six-year period extending from 1988 to 1993.

SUMMARY

The most discouraging aspect of the study was the shockingly low rate of participation on the part of students and faculty. During the six-year period, responses were obtained from 47 undergraduate students, 76 graduate students, 17 faculty members, and 20 other patrons (See Table 2). In addition, there were a dozen or so responses, so inept, incomplete, obscene or frivolous as to be totally useless. These included responses from patrons who were obviously searching in the wrong catalog such as the undergraduates who attempted to retrieve information on (1) computers, and (2) Marilyn Monroe via the author/title catalog, as well as the following response from one, hopefully undergraduate, patron: "You have got to be kidding; no one is going to take the time to fill all this out. It would take 15-20 minutes!" In more than one instance. the Library received harsh criticism for failing to hold certain items, such as Lee Iacocca's autobiography or Margaret Atwood's The handmaids tale, when in actuality the items were held and it was the patron who had failed to search correctly. One unsuccessful patron was apparently so sure of the correctness of the name Ellen, Ray F. that preceding and following entries were not consulted, with the result that a "See" reference from Ellen, Roy F., which would have led to the correct entry Ellen, R. F., 1947- and

the searched for title was missed. Not that there weren't catalog failures as well for there were; two patrons discovered missing author records, another patron discovered a missing editor added entry, and in a third case, all entries for a work were absent from the public catalog. One unidentified faculty member was even unlucky enough to search for, and naturally failed to locate, two works for which cards were filed a few days later. More than a few patrons took the opportunity to request an on-line catalog, apparently in the belief that electronic access would alleviate their frustration and solve all their problems.

The results of the complete study confirmed the conclusions of the preliminary study with the most surprising finding, one in fact shocking to the authors, being that only 2 of the 160 patrons encountered a "See" reference and one of these was a delimiter Q reference to an entry which the patron should have been able to locate without the "See" reference. For the authors, having been trained to believe without question in the need for name "See" references and expecting a significant number of patrons to encounter "See" references, this outcome was totally unexpected and calls for reexamination of a library practice long thought essential as it is highly improbable that the patrons of the University of Rhode Island main library are unique.

All four categories of patrons approached the catalog with simple personal names, often incomplete and sometimes incorrect, and with frequently incomplete and incorrect supplementary title information yet this information was adequate, in 93% of the searches, to provide for item recognition. As expected, surnames were most frequently found to be correct (94%) with forenames (88%) and other names and initials (76%) less likely to be correct (See Table 2). The overall correctness of surnames, brought to the catalog by URI patrons, is considerably greater than the correctness of surnames (67%) determined by Dickson[6] in her study of author searches in a NOTIS database while the correctness of forenames is only slightly greater than the 81% reported by Dickson.

However, even when searched-for-items were held by the library and cataloging was displayed in the card catalog, approximately 7% of the items could not be identified by the patron. This was due in large part apparently to ignorance of the filing rules or misunderstanding of the cataloging information displayed, with undergraduates being the worst transgressors. One undergraduate even managed to conclude that Henry Bryant Bigelow,s Fishes of the Gulf of Maine was only to be found in a divisional library even though the card identified two additional copies, one in the stacks and the other in the Reference Collection. But other, assumedly more experienced users, were not immune from error either as

evidenced by the graduate student who searched only under the co-authors of a chapter, whose names were not traced, and failed to search under the known title of the book, or the faculty member who searched under von Frisch and somehow missed the "See" reference from Von Frisch, Karl, 1886- directing him to Frisch, Karl von, 1886- where 12 titles were to be found. Even for those items accurately identified by the patron, there is reason to be suspicious of the ultimate conclusion of the search: i.e. locating the physical item on the shelf. In at least 6% of the searches, the holding library went unrecognized and in at least 10% of the searches, the call number was transcribed inaccurately or incompletely, with transposition of numbers the most common error. This total figure of 23%, which represents user failure at the catalog, is probably low due to incomplete responses but equals the average of the range of figures reported by other investigators such as [Tagliacozzo (35%), 1970[7]; Radford (26%), 1983[8]), Lipitz (16%), 1972[9]; Saracevic (20%), 1977,[10] and Palais (20%), 1980[11]].

CONCLUSIONS

The results are still arguably inconclusive, due to the scarcity of data alone, but if the results even approximately represent patron needs for "See" references in university library author catalogs, university library catalogers would appear to be wasting valuable resources

providing a service little needed by many of their patrons. In fact, patron search results suggest that much more attention should be paid to teaching patrons better searching techniques and helping them to understand cataloging conventions, and institutional specific information. Some of the searching failures, i.e. those involving incorrect author information, could have been avoided if only the patron had searched also under title.

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Table 1

AUTHOR SEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Describe purpose of search.

2. Write in exact form(s) of author's name (personal or corporate) searched. (Use additional questionnaires for different authors)

   a. _____

   b. _____

   c. _____

   d. _____

   e. _____

3. Did you encounter a cross reference (See/Search under or See also/Search also under)?

   a. Yes _____ b. No _____

4. Write down the cross reference.

5. Write down the form of author's name under which you found the item for which you were searching.

6. Write down any other information you know about your search (e.g. title, subject, etc.).

7. Was your catalog search successful?

   a. Yes _____ b. No _____

8. If yes, write down call no(s). of pertinent books.

9. Your status:

   a. Undergraduate student _____

   b. Graduate student _____

   c. Faculty _____

   d. Other (specify) _____

Table 2

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

	UNDERGRADUATE				GRADUATE				FACULTY				OTHER				TOTAL			
	yes	(%)	no	(%)	yes	(%)	no	(%)	yes	(%)	no	(%)	yes	(%)	no	(%)	yes	(%)	no	(%)
1. Patron search information.																				
a. Surname correct	44	(94)	3	(06)	71	(93)	5	(07)	17	(100)	0	(---)	19	(95)	1	(05)	151	(94)	9	(06)
b. Forename correct	36	(78)	10	(22)	62	(84)	12	(16)	16	(94	1	(06)	12	(60)	8	(40)	126	(88)	17	(12)
c. Other names correct	12	(--)	4	(--)	30	(--)	9	(--)	5	(---)	0	(---)	8	(--)	4	(--)	55	(76)	17	(24)
2. Cross reference encountered	2	(04)	45	(96)	0	(--)	76	(100)	0	(---)	17	(100)	0	(--)	20	(100)	2	(01)	158	(99)
3. Results of catalog search.																				
a. Searched item held	42	(--)	5	(--)	64	(--)	12	(--)	13	(--)	4	(--)	18	(--)	2	(--)	137	(86)	23	(14)
b. Searched item held and identified	38	(--)	4	(--)	62	(--)	2	(--)	12	(--)	1	(--)	15	(--)	3	(--)	127	(93)	10	(7)
c. Holding library recognized	34	(--)	2	(--)	58	(--)	4	(--)	8	(--)	2	(--)	10	(--)	-	(--)	73	(--)	8	(06)
d. Call no. transcribed accurately	23	(--)	5	(--)	34	(--)	6	(--)	8	(--)	-	(--)	8	(--)	2	(--)	73	(--)	13	(10)